

Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Florida
195th Grand Communication
R.: W.: Ryan M. Lombardi
W.: Grand Orator 2023-2024
Grand Oration

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master, Elected and Appointed Grand Lodge Officers, revered Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters, Right Worshipful District Deputy Grand Masters, Right Honorables, Distinguished Guests, ladies, and My Brothers All:

My name is Ryan Lombardi and I have the distinct honor and pleasure of serving as your Grand Orator this year.

It's funny when you have a year to prepare a speech, it feels like you've got the rest of your life to write it, to make it perfect, to make it better than anything anyone's ever heard before; and then the advice starts to roll in from everywhere.

Things like, "Brother, just give your personal experience" to "no matter what you do R.: W.: don't talk about yourself." Then there's "R.: W.: try to stay positive; you don't want to rub anyone the wrong way," and then of course there's "listen Brother, whatever you do don't get up there and sugar coat it! You say what needs to be said!"

Like I said, it's funny when you have a year to prepare a speech.

In all seriousness and respect, I would like to thank Most Worshipful Glen Bishop, Grand Master, for trusting me to give this year's Grand Oration and to have the distinct honor of traveling this year as an Appointed Grand Lodge Officer. Most Worshipful, I am proud to call you my friend and my Brother and I congratulate you on a job well done. Thank you for all of your efforts this year, Most Worshipful.

I've learned a lot about myself this year. I also feel that I have learned a lot about the Craft as a whole. I like to think that I've always presented myself as the type of man to whom people trust to confide in and count on, someone who works hard, studies diligently and always puts 110% into everything that I do, in my family and professional life as well as Freemasonry and to that point I can also shamelessly say that I have always enjoyed the gratification both personally as well as the praise and appreciation that comes from others for a job well done. Now that last part will often create in most men, whether he realizes it or not, a silent battle between pride and ego; the focus of my Oration.

It goes without saying that I have truly enjoyed the many new relationships that have been built over the last year and the multitude of conversations, opinions, and insights I have gained by the opportunity to carry this Collar.

I have, however, come to realize that many people have in my opinion, a misconception of the representation of these Collars and this realization has directed my heart in the writing of this oration.

You see, I find that many Brothers hold this idea that a Collar or title somehow magically elevates a man to some next level of Masonic status, if you will, whether at the state or local level it is, in my opinion, as far from the principles and teachings of this great Fraternity as one can be. In its truest essence the Collar symbolizes an elected or appointed servant to the Craft. It does not by any means bestow an elevated rank

in social status yet says loudly I am here to work, to lend a hand, an ear and if possible a word to assist in all things relevant to the Craft. In its truest representation it is a sign of a humble servant.

I have learned that carrying a Collar or holding a title comes with an incredible responsibility. You see all of a sudden everybody wants to talk to you. Everyone wants to discuss their ideas, their joys, and their grievances, the things that they would like to see improved in the Fraternity, as well as ideas in ways to improve not only the personal journey but that well guided journey that we owe to our newly Initiated, Passed, and Raised Brothers, to give them that education, direction, and light that one truly seeks and expects when joining such a prestigious and ancient Fraternity.

Unfortunately, it is at this point we often fall short; maybe due to our own inadequacies, too little effort, or simply a failure in our own ability to intimately understand the teachings and principles of our profession. Often times when advancing Brothers through the Degrees we focus solely on completing that task. In doing so we just as often lose the essence or teachings that are found within the task itself. This essence is never more abundant than in the teachings of Freemasonry, for this system was formed in its inception meant to strike intrigue into the mind of those seeking its fruits; to create an opportunity to ponder, to explore, and to investigate its every part. That we may come to better understand ourselves, whereby through our newfound education we may in fact better ourselves.

Instead, we have learned to relegate ourselves to some perceived time frame by advancing Brothers as fast as possible so they don't "lose interest" completely depriving our intellectual assertion in the name of advancement. As a business owner you learn in time that quantity over quality has a fuse. In some instances it may be long burning and in others it may be brief yet in all instances it always ends exactly the same.

I believe that we owe it to our Lodges, our Brothers, and our Fraternity as a whole to slow down, to do better, and to cultivate a culture of true enlightenment. To lead by example not because of a title or symbol but because we ourselves have put in the time, done the work, and studied the Craft and have an earnest desire to build pillars out of men and not monuments of ourselves.

Therefore, my Brothers and friends, I say be humble in your successes and achievements as they could never be yours alone. For it is the greatest and best in others who came before you who have shaped and carried the stones that paved the very road you now walk high upon.

To that point, I would like to read a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

"To laugh often and much: To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded."

I would like to share with you all something very personal to me. You see very early in my Masonic Career I was approached by an elder Illustrious Brother who said to me one single sentence, it is something that I carry with me every day and try my best to act upon, he said "congratulations and welcome my Brother and never ever forget that we are the protectors of the ancient knowledges." It was that simple sentence at that very moment that instilled in me this great sense of responsibility to honor Freemasonry in all its parts and in the name of all those who came before me whose name I will never know.

We often hear “I’m a ritualist, not an esoterist” and vice versa. My Brothers, these terms are no way mutually exclusive as one can never truly be an esoterist and not a ritualist, as a great education without application is simply a theory. Conversely, you can never truly be a ritualist without learning the esoterics for portraying a good man does not make a good man.

Now let me say this, some of the greatest and best men and Masons that I have ever known proudly claim to be one or the other. This is in no way a slight or judgment on them, but instead a testament to the work that lies ahead for each of us all regardless of title, achievement, or even age.

My Brothers and friends, I feel we are reaching a tipping point, a hollowing out if you will of the ancient essence of our Fraternity and to that point society as a whole. There was a time, before all of the distractions of today, before television and schedules consumed our every waking moment, before smart phones and computers captured our conciseness and detached us from our true selves, when man would stare into the night sky and contemplate the great achievements of the Grand Architect of the Universe. My hope is that we can all find a renewed sense of appreciation and gratitude for the gifts that God has given each and every one of us and then use those gifts to help each other.

My Brothers, if fortune favors the bold then legends favor the brave. I challenge you all to be brave in the face of complacency and familiarity. Be powerful in your humility and never, never mistake titles or achievements as the path to immortality as it is the achievements of those who will come after us by traveling along the path we have beaten and the road we have laid in the hope of someone else’s future success that truly defines us as a people.

I would like to read one last quote that I often give to our newly Raised Master Masons. I find it helps when teaching them that they should learn from and respect our Past Masters, Past Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Masters, our Lodge elders, and of course our Secretaries. Equally important I believe instills in them that they are not only duly entitled to but directly responsible for leading our Lodges into the future. We must therefore nourish and cultivate their strengths.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that others won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine as children do. It’s not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own lights shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear our presence automatically liberates others.” by Marianne Williamson.

My Brothers, if a job is available, then it should be done. If a job is to be done it should be done well and with the same freedom, fervency, and zeal that each Mason finds beaming from within every part of his being, from his Initiation to receiving the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. We owe a great debt to this Fraternity, for held within it are great mysteries waiting to be understood; history, antiquity, the meanings brilliantly hidden in its symbolisms, the inner teachings of this great system of philosophy, this wonderful power which moves men’s hearts and provokes goodness toward all mankind. For all of this, all that is asked of us, my Brothers, is simply everything. My Brothers, we must take the time to attend to our working tools; be honorable at your several stations and not just in Lodge but in all aspects of life. Pay attention to the prayers that are graciously delivered before the opening and closing of our communications. Be men of good moral character; be honest and fair; especially my Brothers when no one is watching.

We should always stand up for what is right, hold ourselves accountable to our word and always speak and act in righteousness and truth, not because it is popular or easier, not because we think it's what everyone will want to hear, but because it is what is necessary to preserve the honor and dignity of our beloved Craft, because it is necessary to preserve the very spirit that drives each of us.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your time, your continued efforts and contributions in ensuring a strong future of this great Fraternity. May the Grand Architect of the Universe lay blessings and protection upon your homes, your families, and your Lodges. May he protect those who protect this country both here and abroad and may God Bless this Great Nation.

Thank you all.